

DO COPPER UNDERWINGS (*AMPHIPYRA* SPP.)
CRAWL AWAY IN ORDER TO
DIE IN PEACE?

By BRIAN O. C. GARDINER *

Many years ago (Gardiner 1959) I remarked how dead examples of the copper underwing (*Amphipyra pyramidea* L.) could nearly always be found inside attic windowsills. This was before the separation of this moth into two species, *pyramidea* and *berbera*. (Fletcher 1967) Since then I have from time-to-time noticed one or other of them in many similar situations, but particularly in outdoor sheds and barns. Indeed, so many did I at times come across in such situations that I wondered if they had not deliberately chosen to creep into such locales as they felt their end was approaching. While it can be argued that memory can play one false, I have over the years had the distinct impression that it is by far the commonest moth, in terms of percentage of the total moth population to be so found. Recently chance came my way to carry out a survey of the actual numbers involved. The chance was presented by becoming involved in the search for housing, both for friends and my own children. This involved visiting and viewing many houses in the Cambridge area during the autumn and winter of 1985. Many of these had garden sheds, often neglected and in poor condition, hence ideal as habitations for all sorts of insect. Noticing a specimen of the copper underwing in one of the earlier houses visited, I decided to keep a specific look out for it in future. Rather to my satisfaction the results showed that my earlier impression was correct. It was not only present in most of the properties visited, but was by far away the commonest moth to be found. Due, however, to the fact that many of them were in poor condition, often partly or entirely (apart from wings) eaten by spiders, clothesmoths or larder beetles, it was not possible to determine the exact species involved and so no attempt was made to do this. It is likely, since both occur in the Cambridge area, that a mixed population was involved. The numbers of moths found are presented in Table 1.

These results quite clearly indicate that copper underwings like to enter sheds and attics and they then became trapped therein. It seems likely that this is due to their habit, like their congener, the mouse (*Amphipyra tragopoginis* Clerk), of being rather secretive and tending to scuttle rather than fly. One might also assume that the members of this genus are thigmokinetic and having found the crack under the door or around the windowsills have crept in, in order to have the feel of all-round comforting protection from pre-

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Location	Number	Copper Underwings	Yellow Underwings	Other Moths
Sheds	17	23	7	8
Attics	27	14	4	12

Table 1. Numbers of copper underwings, yellow underwings and other moths found trapped on the windowsills of sheds and attics in Cambridge during autumn/winter 1985.

dators. When the time has come to leave the following day, or when danger is passed, they have taken the wrong turning and ended up trapped in the shed or attic. One explanation as to why they cannot find their way out again, as they did to enter, could be that on entering they are going towards a dark place, but in order to exit they would of course be heading towards the light shining through the window. It is more than likely that they also enter other rooms but when these are in constant use they get the opportunity to escape when the windows are regularly opened.

References

- Fletcher, D. S. (1967) *Amphipyra pyramidea* Linnaeus and *A. berbera* Rungs (Lep., Noctuidae), two species confused. *Entomologist's Gaz.* 19:91-106.
- Gardiner, B. O. C. (1959) The Lepidoptera of a Dover Garden. *Entomologist's Gaz.* 10: 2-16.

PIMPINEL PUG (EUPITHECIA PIMPINELLATA HUBN) (LEP.: GEOMETRIDAE) IN LEICESTERSHIRE — A single male of this species was caught in the Rothamsted Insect Survey Light trap at Empingham (Site No. 280, O.S. Grid Ref. SK 953 087) on the night of 5/5-viii-1986. The identity of the specimen was confirmed by examination of the genitalia. So far as I am aware this species has not previously been recorded in Leicestershire.

Thanks are extended to M. Tyler for operating the trap at Empingham. ADRIAN M. RILEY, Dept. Entomology, Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 2JQ.

ANTICHLORIS ERIPHIA F (LEP.: CTENUCHIDAE) A CORRECTION — In a recent account (Barnett, R. *Ent. Rec.* 98: 240) a specimen of *A. eriphea* taken in 1985 was claimed as the first record for Britain. It has since been drawn to our attention that the first British specimen was recorded in 1980 (Evans, K. *Ent. Rec.* 93: 230) and a second was noted in 1982 (Young M. *Entomologist's Gaz.* 34:53).

PAS.